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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000273

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KREL](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVISTAS TAKE OVER CARACAS ARCHBISHOP'S RESIDENCE

REF: A. CARACAS 000248
[1](#)B. CARACAS 000259

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT RICHARD DOWNES,
REASON 1.4 (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Hard-line Chavistas temporarily occupied the Archbishop's Residence in Caracas on February 27. They held a press conference on the premises to denounce Catholic Church leaders and the Papal Nuncio for hindering the revolution as well as to express support for the deceased bomber of the Venezuelan Chamber of Commerce. Cardinal Jorge Urosa condemned the take-over and blamed the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) for inciting attacks on institutions and individuals. Only hours after the incident at the Archbishop's, President Chavez distanced himself from this action and blamed the take-over on infiltrators trying to discredit his government. He urged his hard-line supporters to exercise more "revolutionary discipline." The take-over to some extent stole the spotlight from the BRV's "good news" story of the release of four FARC hostages the same day. It may also be symptomatic of decreasing BRV control over some of the most radical Chavistas. End Summary.

You Say You Want A Revolution

[1](#)2. (SBU) Firebrand Chavista Lina Ron and dozens of her masked Venezuelan Popular Unity (UPV) supporters temporarily seized the Archbishop's Residence in Bolivar Square in downtown Caracas the morning of February 27. Ron and her supporters forced their way into the residence and controlled access into the building while setting up a press conference inside. UPV students read a lengthy communique to the media denouncing the Catholic Church leadership as "reactionary" and criticizing the "counter-revolutionary" Papal Nuncio for giving refuge to student leader Nixon Moreno.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Ron told the media that she considered Hector Serrano, the bomber who was killed February 24 while trying to plant explosives at the Venezuelan Chamber of Commerce (Ref A), to be a "martyr of the revolution." She criticized the government for raiding apartments in the "January 23" neighborhood in western Caracas as part of the investigation of that bombing. Ron also suggested that opposition-oriented cable news network Globovision "lower its profile" or face the wrath of "sovereign people." She implied that the UPV

has an agenda for further street actions, saying it was tempting to "place a bomb" at Globovision, but that this was "up to others as they see fit." Many of Ron's supporters at the Archbishop's residence wore T-shirts emblazoned with the slogan: "With Chavez, Everything; Without Chavez, Lead Bullets."

Free Your Mind Instead

¶4. (SBU) Cardinal Jorge Urosa, who resides at the Archbishop's Residence, condemned the UPV take-over in comments to the local media. He noted that even though Ron and her UPV supporters did not damage any property, seizing the building was in itself an act of violence. Urosa urged the Venezuelan government to "inject a great dose of serenity and calm and to stop such attacks on institutions and persons." He also said it was "no coincidence" that this incident happened because a senior official (President Chavez) has been particularly critical of the Papal Nuncio and of him. Chavez has lambasted both Cardinal Urosa and the Papal Nuncio during televised speeches. In early January, Chavez supporters physically harassed Urosa as he was leaving his residence.

It's Gonna Be All Right

¶5. (SBU) President Chavez distanced himself from the UPV take-over. In phoned-in comments to the hard-line Chavista "Razor Blade" television talk show the night of February 27, Chavez urged Ron and her supporters to "reflect" on their actions and to take on "a minimum of revolutionary discipline." Chavez suggested that Ron's group had been "infiltrated by the (U.S.) empire" to discredit his

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administration. Chavez expressed concern that some of his supporters have "anarchist tendencies" who "obey no one" and who are damaging the "revolution in progress." He did not, however, specifically rebuke the pro-Chavez Frente Guerrillero Venceremos, which claimed responsibility for the recent bombing incidents in Caracas.

Comment

¶6. (C) Hard-line Chavistas commemorated on February 27 the anniversary of the 1989 "Caracazo" riots with numerous events. To some extent, the UPV take-over of the Archbishop's Residence and a vigil in front of Globovision were part of that effort. The UPV's actions at the Archbishop's Residence, however, obscured media attention from the story the BRV wanted most to promote the same day -- its facilitation of the release of four prominent FARC hostages held in Colombia (Ref B). BRV officials have for a long time winked at, and at times tacitly encouraged, the street actions of their fervent left-wing supporters. However, in the wake of a series of bombing incidents and the Archbishop's Residence take-over, the BRV appears to be increasingly embarrassed by the actions -- or by the bungling -- of their most extreme supporters. Nevertheless, it is also true that had the bomber not set off his explosive prematurely and had the Venezuelan Chamber of Commerce watchman not promptly reported the bombing to the opposition-controlled Chacao Borough Police, the bomber's connection to the Metropolitan Police may have never come to light.

¶7. (C) In the wake of his electoral defeat in the December 2007 constitutional referendum, Chavez appears not only to face an emboldened opposition, but also internal challenges from his most ideologically extreme left-wing supporters.

Some 80,000 voters cast their ballot for Chavez in 2006 on Ron's UPV ticket, and the UPV was among the first of many small pro-Chavez parties to disband to join Chavez' new United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). However, Ron is reportedly seeking to reconstitute her UPV party outside the PSUV.

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